A POSTMODERN STAGE PLAY & OPERA

A WORK OF THEATER

Measures of Human Dignity

A play in three acts

Nathan Mutanda Chukueke

1995

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Measures of Human Dignity

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Genre: Postmodern Stage Play / Opera

Themes: Human dignity, homelessness, social stratification, interdisciplinary performance

Background & Production Overview

Measures of Human Dignity is a postmodern stage play and opera conceived in the tradition of interdisciplinary performance works. The following synoptic notes summarize the intentions of each scene and introduce the world of the production.

1. Multi tries to get a job, but possible employers don't like his clothing. His ragged but clean clothes make it hard for him to get any job, so he hangs out on the street. Another multi with good job-hunting clothing also fails to find work. Two other multis try for a job. One gets a job and then shares his food with a friend. At first the others want to hurt the non-sharing multi, then decide it is not worth it. Perhaps the other has kids, or he is simply in his own space.

2. A rainy day. A man and his dog. The dog and man look alike in the rain. They sit in a doorway protected from the rain, but not the cold.

3. A multi tries to read, but cannot. He gets up and moves around, then proceeds to read.

4. An old multi man sits on a corner singing the unsung spiritual folk songs of the street people. *An idea for the song: "They were the people of yesterday blues. They had a touch of grace and harmony that was as clear as stream water."*

5. Avatar Watching. In Scene One, Tom, Jack, and Dom are the main characters, but there is also a neutral person in the area who sits and watches. The neutrals are known as *Avatars*. They are watchers who only interact with the characters through song and dance. The Avatars never dance or sing with the multis, blues, or grays. The main role of the Avatar is to sound the coming of the night and the dawn.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

JACK	—	A young multi boy in Act One, Scene One.
JAKE	—	A main male role in the production.
GAIL	—	A main female role in the production.
HARRY	—	Jack's multi father.
FRANK	—	Multi man who works in a bookstore in Act One, Scene Two.
SAM	—	A cafe owner in Act One, Scene Two.
DOM	—	An old can collector in Act One.
TOM	—	Deaf and mute multi; a painter.
ALICE	—	A fourteen-year-old multi girl and Scott's sister.
SCOTT	—	Twelve-year-old multi; Alice's brother.
BILL	—	Jerk from the after-hours place.
DELL	—	A young blue kid who befriends Jack.
SUE	—	A woman from Jake's past.
CHRIS	—	Sue's companion.
STEVE & JANE	—	A gray couple who wander into dangerous territory in Act Three.
AVATARS	—	Watchers — beings dwelling in a dimension beyond the multis, grays, and blues. They observe, sound the horn of night and dawn, and ultimately speak in choral harmony.

SOCIAL GROUPS

MULTIS	—	The homeless of the city. They live their lives in the night, in the shadows of the streets.
BLUES	—	A social class above the multis. Well-dressed, working, city-dwelling.

GRAYS	—	A social class similar to the blues; together they represent the mainstream population.
AVATARS	—	Transcendent watchers. Two women and one man appear first in Act One.

STAGING NOTES

Set: *The staging should reflect an urban setting that does not have an affinity with any single cultural or social setting. One should feel that this part of the city is old and run down. Buildings have old tin garbage cans in front of them. Families, students, businessmen walk the street by day. At night the multis come out to live their lives.*

Lighting: *Street lights in multiple colors, some frost white. Some lighting blinks on and off. Some lights are sharp and narrow.*

Music: *This production should have music, dance, and theater combined as organically as possible. The texture must be rich but not thick. Players must feel and express themselves but remain understandable to anyone, regardless of background.*

ACT ONE

THE STREETS AT DAWN

SCENE ONE

Dusk Becomes Dawn

> **SETTING**
>
> It is that eternal moment when dusk becomes the dawn in the city of shadows. Street lights glow in multiple colors, some frost white, some blinking on and off. The story begins as the male multi named Harry and his son Jack are both looking for tin beverage cans that they will trade in for money or credits at a local store. There are two women and one man Avatar sitting off to the side, watching.

Jack casually watches as his father shows him the proper way of sorting and picking cans. Jack has heard these lessons a million times over and is getting a little bored. Harry shows Jack how to be neat as he collects cans and explains how the streets are their home and should be kept clean. Harry is not paying attention to whether his son is listening. Unintentionally, Jack slowly drops back from his father — standing still for a moment as he notices an old man across the street.

The old man's name is Dom. He is drinking from a can he is collecting. Jack licks his lips and watches Dom. What Dom is doing seems like a good idea, but Jack shakes his head. Jack then catches up to his father, who has just noticed he was gone. Jack pulls his father's arm and points to Dom across the street. Harry smiles and pats his son on the back, then looks across the street and gestures that the old guy is crazy. Harry coughs and goes back to collecting cans.

Jack is puzzled by his father's lack of concern for Dom's health. Harry had taught Jack that drinking from the cans in the garbage is very bad for you. Jack crosses the street quietly. His father does not see him.

Jack slowly walks across the street. He pauses by Dom and just stares at him in concern and wonderment. Dom doesn't see the boy at first. Dom is a little drunk and sloppy as he drops garbage on the street while looking for cans. After a while Dom notices the boy. Dom looks at little Jack, thinking this boy must be crazy.

JACK

The father says drinking from old cans will make you sick.

(Jack pauses, looks down, then up into Dom's face, and sings the following libretto.)

LIBRETTO — JACK'S SONG

Dear Sir: You know not what you do, that drink you have can hurt you more than you can know. And I know you're old and just want warmth from the cold, but you got to know that your drink will hurt more than the cold that lay so deep in your soul.

Dear Sir: You know not what you do, that drink you have can hurt you more than you can know.

Remember, the morning light begins a new day shining, and with its rise new stars are born, so why not you.
There's got to be more than the twilight and the pain that hides in the shadows of your soul.
If you can reach beyond the twilight, you grasp the hope that lay there.

Dear Sir: You know not what you do, that drink you have can hurt you more than you can know.

Then crazy old Dom, looking puzzled, asks Jack if he has something to drink. Jack pauses after pointing to his father (who is waving). He then gives Dom some of his empties and tells him to buy a drink at the store. The old one takes some cans, shakes Jack's hand, and says he must go before the light comes out.

As an afterthought, as Jack begins to cross the street, the old man takes a few quick steps toward Jack. Harry, a little nervous, just stands there. Dom pulls out a book from his bag and gives it to Jack. The boy thanks him and walks back to his father.

Harry smiles then coughs when he sees the book; he waves to the departing Dom. Now the sun is coming out. Jack puts his arm under his father's and helps him into the shadows of a day which, a mere moment ago, was the night. Everyone drifts back into the shadows. Dom finds an almost full can of beer. He spills a little on the street to see what it looks like. He smiles at the can and is about to drink, then he notices the Avatars watching him with blank looks on their faces. They seem to make him ponder for a short moment.

Dom decides not to drink from the can and drops it into trash. He fixes his clothes and looks to the sky, which is almost dawn. He stands still for a moment, then walks away into the remaining darkness.

END OF ACT ONE — SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

The Bookstore Block

MUSIC

After Harry and Jack have vanished into the shadows and dawn breaks, the music changes to a full-bodied modern classical number, Gothic in undertone. It begins slowly but the tempo increases as the scene progresses. Always there is a soft Gothic undertone; there must be a sense of sorrow (and hope), but the beat must not be too slow. There is hope in this music. This faith should perhaps come from the woodwind instruments. Bells and steel percussion may also balance out the music.

BACKGROUND — FEELING

East Village feeling with the West Side mid-teens area look.

BACKGROUND — BLOCKING

As the sun comes out, the people of the city awaken for the day. The grays and blues come forward from their well-kept houses. They check their watches, look for cabs, or walk to the train. They seem fresh and clean for a new day. A few multis are begging on the street this morning. Three businesses are on this block: a bookstore, a video shop, and a store for rent. Trash cans are placed on the street. The garbage truck makes its daily passage. Upstage, a man with a dog — the dog and man somehow look alike — sit in a doorway sharing some food.

LIGHTING

Non-directional soft light focused on the general scenery. Track lights from the floor may work here. A little mist is used. Some type of key or spotlight should be on the dripping box on the truck.

A shopkeeper is opening his bookstore. As he unlocks the steel gate from a window, he notices a large bundle of clothing blocking his way to the last gate. He shakes his head. Bending down with nostrils sealed for the moment, the shopkeeper screams at the bundle. Instantly there is movement in the bundle; the face of a man in his early thirties appears. He is unfazed by this sudden wakening. The man, still very sleepy, is a multi man named Frank. The shopkeeper smiles and announces the time of morning.

Frank, hearing this, jumps to a sitting posture. From under the clothing he pulls out his own watch. He shakes it, but the timepiece does not work. Looking up at the blue book shopkeeper, the multi man Frank smiles. The shopkeeper shakes his head, pulls out a bar of soap and drops it near Frank, pointing to the basement. Frank understands — he has worked for the blue shop owner watching and selling the books kept in great wooden boxes on the street. Gathering up his clothes, the multi man goes down the basement stairs to take a bath. Before he goes downstairs, Frank sings a short song.

LIBRETTO — FRANK'S SONG

Yes, that's the one, with whom I'll share this day.

Yes, that's the one who'll get the pleasure of my company.

Yea, I sell his books and pass the time. Make a few bucks and buy some wine,

but never too much that I'm wasting my time.

You know that old boy is a lucky guy.

After all, when ones like that help those like me they help themselves to a bit of humanity.

Yea, he gives me grief, but I just grin.

Yea, it'll be a good day because I'll sell some books but not my soul.

Yea, it's a good day to spend some time drinking wine.

Gail, the main female character, enters the scene. Her clothing is plain but clean. Her hair a little strange, but not trendy. Gail has the face of someone tired but determined. She asks the book shopkeeper for directions. She is looking for a particular restaurant, where she hopes to get work. Frank looks at her in wonderment before he goes back to his work.

Gail walks on down the street. She passes the deaf multi painter, Tom, who is displaying his work on the sidewalk. She stops for a moment to look at his work. He smiles as their eyes meet and they pause for just a moment. They wave goodbye to each other as she walks away. Gail walks a few steps and stops. The lights dim on the set and a spotlight focuses on her. Gail sings a song about being in the city.

GAIL'S SONG — NO. 1

This is the dawn of my life, not the beginning of just any day.

For this one is mine, the first day of my new life.

Yea, there'll be no more pain any more.

Dreams of love will fill this day and warm my nights.

Songs of love will dance upon the air.

For this is my day. I'm here to stay,

because this is the dawn of my life.

She walks across the street and enters the restaurant. The restaurant owner Sam is cleaning tables. Gail takes a deep breath, walks over to Sam. She asks politely if he needs any waitress help. At first he does not seem to notice her question, then comes round only as she is walking away. Sam wipes his forehead and calls to the girl.

SAM'S SONG — LIBRETTO (STACCATO IN TIMING)

Yea, girl this is my world. It's a fresh new world.

I'm depending on you to keep it a clean world.

These tables must be done. Make them shine and make them smooth.

Make them bright and clear as glass.

Just remember, the big tips start here, my dear. Big tips start here.

Just remember this is my restaurant, not your restaurant.

Remember this and we'll get along just fine, just fine.

As Sam finishes, Gail stares at him in a blank but cold manner. There is a moment of tension. She looks down to the rag in the owner's hand. She lifts her arm and extends her opened hand, as if pleading with some hesitation. He throws the rag to her and the scene ends as she catches it.

END OF ACT ONE — SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

Tom's Dance of Rage

SETTING

A block around the corner from the bookstore.

MUSIC

The mood must begin to change now. The music reflects a peaceful yet strong undercurrent. Now is the time when different cultural beats begin to interface. The spirits of songs begin to blend; the fabric of different cultures intermingles. Suggested style: a light, female choral arrangement; drums in Kano style or African beats, but with more classical jazz undertones.

It is later the same morning, getting a little foggy. Tom is in a good mood. He is trying to sell some things on the sidewalk. A few people pass. A woman stops to look at Tom's things. One of the items is a cross on a stand. The gray woman pauses, then takes from her basket a purple rose and puts it on the neck of the cross. Unmoved, Tom slowly takes a small flat book from under his bag and gives it to her. They wordlessly glance at each other, then she walks away. Tom puts the rose in another bag with other roses of different colors.

As the lighting changes, some gray drug dealers and multis are seen talking and hanging out. Then a group of blues and grays are just coming out of an after-hours nightclub. They are all very drunk and silly. The sun hurts their eyes as they stumble onto the street. Three girls and two guys. One guy in the

group is named Jake; he is new to the group and seems to be just tagging along for the company. Bill, a jerk, is the leader of the group.

The group sees Tom the painter. Bill points at him and begins to laugh out loud. The others laugh too as they approach Tom. Jake, who was laughing, stops when they come before Tom. Bill is still pointing at Tom and smiling in his face. Bill motions to have Tom take a drag from a joint. Tom shakes his head. Tom tries to smile, but he is really scared. The women join in on the fun, playing with the paintings Tom is selling. Bill is annoyed that Tom won't say anything, splashes red wine on Tom's yellow shirt, then smashes the wine bottle on the floor and pushes the frightened painter. Jake becomes upset.

JAKE

"Lay off him."

BILL

"What's your problem? This lazy bum a friend of yours?"

JAKE

"No, but he is not bothering you."

BILL

"Yeah, that's true, but it's fun to mess with his head." *(Bill laughs at Tom.)* "You don't mind me messing with you, do you?" *(Talking to Tom.)*

The street multis now notice what is going on with Tom. Just as the doormen to the after-hours club decide to do something about the unwanted scene in front of the club, something happens.

Suddenly, out of nowhere two young multi kids grab and cut the handbags away from the two gray/blue girls. The kids run away with the bags. Bill looks at Tom as if he is to blame, then runs off with the girls in pursuit of the kids. Before Bill runs off, he tries to give Tom a good shot in the face, but Tom ducks. Jake bends over to see if Tom is all right. The street people, who have slowly emerged, tell Jake to leave Tom to himself. Jake says he is sorry and runs to join the group.

Tom's body is shaking as he now sits alone. He stops shaking after a short while and gets up. All time seems to stop as he picks himself up. He takes a few unsteady steps and leans against a lamp post. He bangs his hands against the light post in a violent but voiceless rage. Tom's rage becomes so great that his hands miss the lamp post completely. He stumbles and then stops. He slowly comes to his feet.

DANCE — TOM'S SOLO

Tom dances a solo dance of anger, pain, and then the calm after a storm. It perhaps starts with Tom in a bent-over position; the music goes quiet for a moment as Tom's hands start the dance — stretching out to the stars. The hands shake with tension as they slowly move skyward. Then in one sharp movement the hands are retracted and this tormented essence of a human being rolls forward and jumps to the air in a spinning back kick. This first part of the dance is very tense and explosive. The movement alternates between flowing northern kung fu pattern and the violent rage of a psychopath. The next part of the dance is concerned with Tai Chi Chuan or Mo Dong Pai type movement and short still moments of silent reflection. There is a sense of hope or faith in life expressed in the texture. The piece uses "time stops" where the music or movement stops as the other continues at different points. As the piece ends, the sense of real time returns. *(Note: this concept is not to be changed if possible.)* Tom is leaning against the light post.

The two multi kids, Alice and Scott, walk up to Tom. Seeing that Tom is not feeling well, they try to comfort him. To communicate with Tom, the kids use sign language. For the first time, it is clear that Tom is mute. As they talk in sign language they all sit down. The kids share some fruit with Tom. They continue to talk as the spotlights on them dim a little. As this scene ends the music expresses this silent moment.

END OF ACT ONE — SCENE THREE

SCENE FOUR

The Cafe & The Street

SETTING

The restaurant down and around the corner from the bookshop. It is autumn; the afternoon.

MUSIC

The music expresses now a lighter sense of spirit, but with a haunting undertone. Perhaps classical western music. Maybe progressive jazz vocals. The mood of the scene, like the other scenes, changes quickly at any time or speed.

Gail now works as a waitress in a nice little restaurant — a Polish cafe called Crako, a bit upper-class. Gail is a hard worker. She is the only person working right now. Her boss tends to get cranky at times. He isn't a bad man, but he can be a real pain.

In front of the restaurant on the corner, two multi kids are hanging out selling comic books and a few porno magazines. One multi man tries to steal one of the magazines. He is a fat man who thinks the kids

are funny. He changes his mind quickly as the multi girl dives and rolls underneath him, landing with her hidden knife at his throat. The man sees the girl is serious, then laughs but backs off. The kids go back to holding up the magazines and asking passersby for a little change.

Meanwhile, Gail's boss is not having a good day; business is slow.

SAM

"Stop daydreaming and look busy."

Gail moves quickly to clean a table that doesn't really need to be cleaned. She looks a little worried. Then Sam, seemingly pleased by Gail's cleaning, goes to the store for some fresh milk. Stepping outside, he shakes his head when he sees the kids selling things and singing in front of his store.

SAM

"You're too close to my cafe, now move away."

The kids, surprised by the boss's outburst, quickly move their things a few doors down. As the cafe owner passes, the two multi kids look at each other in wonderment. Then they move their stuff back.

While Sam is away, a well-dressed gray and blue couple walk into the cafe — a blue guy and a gray woman. They ask for a table among the window seats outside. The guy orders coffee for two. Gail goes to get the coffee and menus. While Gail is away:

WOMAN

"How long do we have to live like this."

MAN

(quietly) "Would you rather live like those stupid kids over there?"

WOMAN

"At least they have their self-respect."

MAN

"Just shut up and remember I'm all you got."

> **MUSIC**
>
> *A little sad or crazy with despair. Jazz, or in the spirit of Frank Zappa.*

The woman just lowers her head. At this point the spotlight dims and then appears on bookstore multi Frank. He is sitting outside the bookshop trying to read. He is following the words with his hand. It is clear he is having a problem. After a while he stops. Frank shakes his head and puts it in his lap. He just strokes his hair as he sits in despair.

As Frank sits, the music of a small band of street singers doing some group harmony is heard in the background. The singers are mostly multis, both women and men. A few passing grays and blues stop and watch; a few join the singing. These are modern blues songs with intercultural overtones. During all this the bookstore multi, who is trying to read, decides to join them through dance. As Frank gets the rhythm of the music he becomes one with the song.

> **DANCE — FRANK**
>
> This dance will smoothly slide through various cultural schools of movement, but first will be a very minimal dance of a person conservatively listening to a music concert. When Frank is done he goes back to reading. One notes that even though he is winded a bit, he reads much more easily and faster now.

After this the focus returns to the restaurant. The couple has just finished drinking lots of expensive wine. The table has been cleaned up and the check received. Outside on the sidewalk, Sam is walking back. He shakes his head when he passes the kids again. The girl sticks her tongue at him and the boy just smiles. Walking back to Crako, Sam sees the couple sitting at an outside table. He walks over.

SAM

"Have you had your order taken?"

CHRIS

"No, we have not, and we have been waiting for a long time."

SAM

"Oh, I'm so sorry for the poor service."

CHRIS

"Well, just be fast about it now."

SAM

"Yes sir, one moment please."

Chris says all this as his hand covers the unpaid check. Sam leaves the well-dressed ones to go yell at Gail. Suddenly, the blue and the gray rise and leave. They are soon walking down the street. They have not paid their check.

Jake is walking in the opposite direction and notices that he knows the woman. They both stop suddenly.

SUE

"Nothing is wrong. This is an old friend."

SUE

"Hello, Jake. It's been a long time."

JAKE

"Hey. You're looking well."

CHRIS

"Hey, I really hate to screw up the wonderful reunion, but we must be going."

SUE

"I wish I had more time."

JAKE

"Well, I guess some things never change."

The couple runs off. The woman takes one small look over her shoulder as they run away. Sam, on the return, can't believe the vacant table. He runs out the door.

SAM

"Coke fiends!"

Gail is shocked as Sam yells at her and blames her for the couple.

SAM

"You stupid girl. I never should have taken a chance on your kind. You're fired. Get out of my face."

GAIL

"The hell with you."

Gail runs off into the night. Sam pauses for a moment then runs the other way after the couple.

Down the street, Jake has come back to Tom, the deaf mute multi painter. He wants to apologize again for what happened before. Tom just smiles. This smile makes Jake realize that Tom is deaf and mute. Now he feels really bad. All he can think of is to buy a painting from Tom. He buys the painting and looks at it.

> ***Director's Note:*** *This painting should express a common link between the deaf multi and Jake. One idea to explore is being trapped in one's own mind. They are both people who fit into their world, but hope to expand beyond its social manipulation and emotional retardation. Not too abstract an expression of this idea.*

Before he can turn his attention back to Tom, Sam comes running along. "Did you see them?" he asks. Jake asks who the man is talking about. After a short description, Jake points in the only direction he knows. But the chase is futile.

Back at the cafe, in the front, the multi kids have moved back to their old spot near Sam's cafe. They've had a good day and now want to relax. The boy starts playing his mouth harp and the girl is reading an old fashion magazine. After a little while the girl stops reading and just listens to her brother. She starts to sing to her brother's song. They sing a song of hope and despair. (Note: this will become the title song of the production.)

They are putting on a show — perhaps a soft rock-and-roll piece. A good crowd forms, mostly grays and blues with a few multis hanging back in the shadows. Some of the crowd is also sitting at the cafe's outdoor tables.

Coming back from the chase, Sam sees all this and must attend to the customers by himself. When the multi kids finish their song, Sam walks over and gives them a bag of food.

The boy thanks Sam. The light dims on this part of the stage. Jake, down the street, is sitting with his bottle of wine. He is thinking about the woman from his past and how he came to see her again. This all passes.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

THE LONG AFTERNOON & THE NIGHT

SCENE ONE

Jake's Song & Dream

> **MUSIC**
>
> *The mood can be seen as one felt on the morning after a long night. This morning mood doesn't have to be a good morning by any meaning. The music reflects some of the texture of the night before, or the week. Note that it is really not morning in this scene, but late afternoon.*

People blue and gray will be coming home soon from work. Not a lot of people are out and about at this point. The cafe owner is just now getting ready for the evening rush. Jake walks by the cafe a little drunk and out of sorts. As Jake passes Sam's restaurant he notices him running about yelling at some new waitress. Jake just stops for a moment as if to measure Sam and to reflect on past events.

As Jake walks further down the street, the boy with the harp offers him a porno magazine to buy. The kid smiles as he offers the fold-out page to Jake to see. Jake just smiles, shakes his head, and walks away.

As he walks, he passes by the deaf multi just hanging out with the multi who works in the bookshop. There is also a young blue kid hanging out — Dell. They are playing a game of cards in the street. As Jake passes by them he asks if they want some of his wine. The bookstore multi takes some of the wine gladly. Dell shakes his head. Jake sees that the other guy is not answering him and asks again, smiling.

The bookshop multi Frank sees this and waves his hand to Jake to stop, asking the deaf multi himself in sign language. The deaf multi says in sign that he does not want any. Jake notes all this and feels really dumb. He nods his head to the guys and they nod back. At this point the deaf guy does something a little different. He crosses his arms and then opens them toward Jake. Jake pauses for a moment, then understands and does the same back, and walks away.

Jake has found a good building stoop to sit on and rest for a while. It is the same kind of stairway one would find in a New York City walk-up brownstone apartment building.

> **MUSIC / DANCE**
>
> *At this point Jake will sing a song while he drinks, casually looking at one of the Avatars and trying to draw the person. The song should be an easy-going song about the street people, the women he knew*

> *in the street, and hope — or a song about the girl that he lost. This song must have orchestration because toward the middle of the song Jake will fall asleep and the rhythm goes on with dance. Jake's voice is replaced by dance. The dance expresses his feelings of sadness and weariness more so than drunkenness. The piece can be a modern ballet or modern dance piece, solo or group, with one role as Jake. The song and the dream are interwoven but the patterns are not the same. The girl will leave Jake in the end of the dance. Jake remains asleep after the song ends and the lights change.*

Jake sits and remembers the past. He thinks about the woman he met in the street. He still loves her but knows he is better off without her. Then he sings the song that later becomes a dance.

JAKE'S SONG — "THANK YOU FOR THE TIME WE SPENT TOGETHER"

I remember the night when she walked away and my words as she stepped out the door.
Before you walk away, just want to say: Thank you for this time together.
I wish I could make our best moments last forever.
Now my days are filled with so much pain.
But now pain gives me warmth from the cold nights without you.

Sometimes I wake up at night thinking what will I do without your love.
Who will I be without you. How will I survive this empty feeling.

Then I remember to give thanks for that time we spent together.
For past the pain of those moments together there is only love.
And all those precious moments will always remind me of you.

As I sit alone in the dark, I wonder how I lost your love,
How I lost that bittersweet feeling. How I lost that priceless sense of being.

And the shadows of our love are cast on every step I take.
And haunt every move I make.
But the visions of our love are the cherished memories of tomorrow's dreams.
I know I'm a better man for having known you, my dear.
I just wish I hadn't lost your love, that sense of being — oh, that tender feeling.

END OF ACT TWO — SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

The Street at Afternoon

Now the general background action of the stage becomes more visible. A gray buys some drugs from a gang of slick blues on the street. An old guy takes a piss on a wall. Another multi man is begging for money from the few grays walking down the street. One older gray gives him a coin. Another gray woman gives the begging multi some food instead of money. The multi, not too surprised, thanks both people with warm gestures.

Jake is sitting by himself on a stump, watching a Watcher and casually trying to draw the multi lying in the street.

END OF ACT TWO — SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

The Gang & Jake

The gang of rough blues and grays are walking down the street. These drug dealers are just passing the two multis playing cards. The deaf multi makes contact with the gang. He buys a joint and smokes it.

Some women grays see the gang before the gang sees them and hide. As the gang walks further down the street they see Jake. A couple of them think it would be good fun to have some fun at Jake's expense. They stop, walk up to Jake, and kick his foot. Jake, in his half-awake state, is offered some drugs. They get mad when he gestures that he doesn't want any. Then they see he has a bottle of booze in his pocket.

One of the gang grabs Jake's booze. Jake is now shocked and a little afraid. He feels they may break his bottle now that they are throwing it around. The gang does not break the bottle — but things get worse. They hold Jake down and try to make him take drugs up his nose, then pour his own booze down his mouth. At this point the horn of the Avatars is sounded and the gang knows it is getting dark. The gang is mad but knows they must leave. They shake Jake up a little more and go. Jake weeps awhile and holds his bottle as the sky darkens.

END OF ACT TWO — SCENE THREE

SCENE FOUR

Night of the Multis — Gail & Jake Meet

> **MUSIC**
>
> *The music here should reflect the overall lifestyle of the people who live in the night. In this scene we begin to see how the multis relate to each other in the night, when not many grays and blues are*

> *present. There is a sense of freedom from the sharp glaring eye of those who dwell in the daylight. A spirited but somber modern primal choral piece of music may work here. A modern Gregorian chant may work. The multis standing around the oil drum fire should perform this chant. This is the first scene where Gail and Jake meet.*

> **SCENE BACKGROUND**
>
> The multis of the night start appearing from all the shadows. There are many different types: can collectors, drunks, kids, women, and old people. Some multis are standing around a few oil drums, all set aflame. All the drums are spread out at different points on the set.

The gang has left the stage and Jake is sitting with his bottle. Down the street, Gail is going into a building, tired after a long day of job hunting. The landlord stops her from entering and puts her bags outside, then goes back in and locks the door. Gail just sits down on the steps of the building. A multi man offers her a bag of drugs. The spotlight on Gail dims as she looks at the drug dealer in a numb manner.

Here the Gregorian chant stops and there is no music. Only the sound of the street remains. The boy from the first scene, Jack, appears again collecting cans. He passes by Gail briefly, then goes on collecting. Dell, walking down the street, has a canned drink he has just finished. When he sees that Jack is working on a garbage can, Dell offers his can to Jack with a smile. He starts up a conversation as Jack smiles back at him.

DELL

"Hey, what's up."

JACK

"Not much, just trying to save up for some extra food credits."

DELL

"Why don't you go to the shelter?"

JACK

"I go sometimes, but the last time I went there were these older guys who were all hands, if you know what I mean. Besides, I got to get food for my father. He's pretty sick."

DELL

"Oh, hope he feels better."

JACK

"Hey, thanks. I don't know why we came to this stinking city anyway. Father said the city was the place to be because the farm was all screwed up. He kept saying that if we stayed we would end up like the primals. You know — from the world stream."

DELL

"Yea, they really got screwed. They're almost all gone."

JACK

"You want to get some food? There is one guy down the block who runs a sort of shelter for kids. It's not official or anything, but it's a good place. He's the only cool gray I ever see. Anyway, he's got some pretty good food. Come on, check it out."

They walk down the street to the building where the shelter is located — a garage with big double doors. The kids first go inside and get some food given to them in bags. The kids then stand by an open window of the same shelter as if they're just hanging out. In the window one can see a man helping very young children — about five to nine years old — to bed. Their caretaker is telling them a story. The story is also a song.

SONG — "TOMORROW" (THE CARETAKER'S LULLABY)

[Spoken]

Once there was a man. He worked long days and worried nights. This man got home partially late one night. His body ached and his mind was adrift. He was about to sleep when he needed to see his children for just a short moment. As they slept he looked upon them and sang to himself.

[Sung]

I had a vision in the twilight. It was like the shadows of our lives.
You are the dreamers of tomorrow.
It was said, you will mold the future of our lives.
You will find this truth lays deep within you, past the mirrors of your eyes.

So dream, little ones, dream. Dream of the futures of tomorrow.
It's up to you to weave the fabric of our lives.
I know it's true. I saw the visions flash before my eyes.

What you've got to do is sleep and dream of hope and tenderness.
Dream past all our pain and misery.
You've got to find the strength that lays within you and become the artists of our future.
And just remember, you are the future of tomorrow. You will mold the future of our lives.

So dream, little ones, dream. You are the vision of all our souls.
Sleep well, the dreamers of tomorrow.

As the caretaker finishes his song, the lights dim in the center for the children. A light mist drifts in as the two boys look at each other for a moment. Then they walk a very short distance and sit down, not looking at each other but sitting close, staring into the darkness eating slowly.

The lighting now dims on the kids as they stare into the night mist. The stage goes dark for a moment. The lights now focus on a different part of the stage: the card game between two multis. The sky is darkening.

The two multis who were playing cards are now standing by Jake, looking at him with a sense of wonderment. Gail now walks onto the stage from behind the two men. She looks tired and her clothing is so beat up that she looks like a multi. As she passes the guys she wonders what they are looking at and stops for a moment. As she looks at Jake, there is something about him that moves something inside

her. When the two multis get a touch of boredom and walk away, Gail sits down next to Jake. For a while she sits next to Jake not saying anything, just looking at him with a concerned look on her face.

Jake has not paid attention to Gail until now. As they look into each other's eyes they smile. Gail sees Jake's pain and wants to comfort him, perhaps because his pain reminds her of her own torment. At some point Gail will sing a song of hope and courage to Jake. As she sings, the two multi kids from earlier will come and sit on the steps with Jake and Gail.

> **GAIL'S SONG — NO. 2**
>
> *[Note in manuscript: the melody and lyrics of this song are left to the director and composer to develop, in keeping with the themes of hope and courage expressed throughout the work.]*

> **DANCE NOTE**
>
> The dance piece is performed by the multi girl. She starts to dance as Gail stops singing. It is a light dance, performed in and around the multis as they go about their lives. Perhaps they sing as they work while she dances; if they do, it should not be too upbeat. The girl dances to a song in her head. The boy, Gail, and Jake would be just sitting watching her dance. The dance ends as Jake and Gail look into each other's eyes.

END OF ACT TWO — SCENE FOUR

SCENE FIVE

The Troopers

> **MUSIC**
>
> *This is a troubled scene.*

While Gail was singing, the boy got to see some of Jake's art from his bag. This will be important in the end of the scene.

Jake and Gail are looking at each other on the staircase. On the lower part of the stair sit the kids, looking at Jake's art. Somewhere in here Jake falls asleep and Gail joins the kids in looking at the art.

At this point, storm-trooper type blues and grays come out of nowhere. Most of the multis are angry to see the troops but also a bit afraid. The troops push some people out of the way as they patrol down the street. When they pass by Jake and the others they stop, noticing him sleeping. They know he is a fellow blue. For some reason they think he was beaten up by Gail and the kids. A few of them push their way up the steps and get Jake. He is too drunk to know what is going on. Gail tries to stop them and gets hit

a little. One of the troops sees the art in the kids' hands and takes it away. The kids play dumb the whole time. They try to comfort Gail as the troops walk away with Jake.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

THE MEASURES OF DIGNITY

SCENE ONE

The Streets at Evening

> **MUSIC**
>
> *As the scene begins there is sound before there is light. A chorus sings as the scene begins. They are on the stage, located in different parts. In groups of three they sing alternating with the other groups at their various places on the stage. It would be nice if the piece had the feeling of a madrigal motet — the kind of sound one would hear on a winter morning across the hilltops from a place where dreams and real-time worlds meet to form the fabric of reality.*

The time is evening, a few days later than the last scene. Dim lights center on the deaf multi and the one from the bookstore. They are looking in the video store window at some show. A different breed of multi walks the street this night — more evil and deadly, bored with being poor and very hungry. The stage action should reflect this idea.

A team of grays dumps food packets in the street for the multis. When the troopers leave, the multis grab the food packets and most disappear into the night. As the deaf multi and the bookstore multi eat, they read a newspaper found in the garbage. They see something that shocks them.

FRANK

"Hey, that's the guy the cops took away. Looks like he's some kind of artist or something. It says the cops saved a valued member of society from the street."

TOM

(Shakes his head and jerks two fingers in and out of his mouth a few times. He then stops and smiles.)

FRANK

"Yea, you're right. It's a real load of shit."

Now, on the other side of the stage, a group of tough-looking multis are hanging out, drinking and laughing at some billboards. As they stand there, a gray couple comes walking down no-man's land. The walk itself is the guy's idea. The girl thinks it is not safe. The guy is Steve and the girl is Jane.

The five or seven mixed multis see some fun to be had with these two grays. They run across the street and move in front of the couple, blocking their path. The more aggressive of the multis asks the couple

what they think they're doing around at this time of night. They also want to know what's in the bag. The gray couple has some food for home. The gray guy thinks he is brave and tries to push his way through them rather than walk around.

> **MUSIC — FIGHT SCENE**
>
> *The music should be fast and hard, but slow and distant. It feels like the sort of thing one would notice if watching it all happen from the other side of a soundproof window, tunnel-vision perhaps.*

When the gray tries to push his way by the multis, the gang proceeds to push him back. In the process of pushing him around they are still having fun with the guy. They act like they are drunk and fight like they know drunken wu shu (a performance-type martial art from China). The girl is not doing so well herself, because some of the gang is pushing her around now. One multi guy wants to flirt with her; one of the girls in the group wants to beat her up.

The gray woman Jane is fighting with the multi women, and she fights much better than Steve. Now all hell seems to be breaking loose. Out of the blue, the gray girl gets a burst of energy and is able to push the gang away long enough to find a corner of a wall to back into, protecting her now-fallen friend. Being very mad, she yells at the multis. The multis stop at this show of power for a moment.

Now this woman gets a little too brave and yells at them louder. The multis think this is a little boring. Some of the gang think it's time for them to cut her.

END OF ACT THREE — SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

Jack's Song — The Avatars Speak

Then a loud, high-pitched, shocking voice is heard. All but the old man and the deaf mute have fallen to the floor. It is the voice of Jack — the boy from the first scene. Jack is kneeling over the dead body of his father. He is grieving the death of his father in song.

JACK'S LAMENT

Ah oh, Father, where have you gone.

Why must I stay here alone.

Why, oh why must this place breed so much pain, so much hate.

Where have the stars gone from the sky.

Where is the light that was once in your eyes?

If living here is without you, I'll join you on the other side.

I'll join you where all this hate may finally subside.

Yes, I'll join you on the other side.

As Jack stops singing, he suddenly picks up a piece of glass. He puts it to his arm. The gang leader jumps to stop him, but is too late. There is a moment of stillness as Jack's blood starts to flow. Then the woman who was being attacked runs over and holds Jack's arm. Jack resists her, but the gang leader is now holding him down. As the woman rips a piece of her dress to treat Jack's wrist, she looks at the gang leader. As they look at each other, others are gathering around.

At this point the Avatars begin their four-part harmony song. The sound of their collective voices changes the colors of the sky. First words are Jack's and then the Avatars join in a sort of chanting harmony.

AVATAR CHANT — STRUCTURE

The Avatars' music has three parts: the chant, the song statement, and the outer alternative. The chant in this scene is not words but sound — a mix of western, southern, and eastern rhythms. It is a sharp and haunting piece. The composer must decide if there is instrumental accompaniment. The chant should have both female and male voices. As the chant ends there is silence; then the song declaration of peace begins. The Watchers are saying the violence must stop. It is a sound of love, respect, and compassion. The outer alternative is about going to live in the hills with the native people — learning the ancient ways, the holistic world. (Careful here: not too corny; perhaps use mystery.)

THE AVATARS' FOUR-PART HARMONY — SONG OF RECKONING

You live in a time where you must make up your mind.
For soon you will have nothing but the shadows of your world.
When will you stop killing one another.
When will you listen to one another.
So before you kill another, just try to understand each other.

You are all doomed, if you can't find a way to live and love each other.
You'll have to search beyond the comfort of the world you feel is real.
It is said pain breeds pain, and love breeds love,
and sometimes they are one in the same.
So understand, our friends, what you must do is not simple,
but the other road may be fatal.
So make yourself a new day from the lessons of your past.

As the lights change to the soft blue of the early morning sky, the Avatars finish their song. Four of the Avatars come out of the shadows and move toward Jack's father's body. They pick the body up. As they walk away, an older female Watcher puts a coat near Jack. It is the cloak of a Watcher. Then she kisses him on the forehead and leaves him as the other Avatars leave the city. Jack will stay in the city.

Jake walks out of the shadows where he has been watching. The gang and all the other multis see him. It is the same gang that was messing with him earlier — Jake notes this. Gail first stops the multis with a pause of the hand, then greets Jake. The girl and boy multi kids go and explain the whole thing to Jake in the background. Jake nods that he saw the whole thing.

After Jake greets Gail, he takes off his blue jacket as a sign of peace. He gives the jacket to the multi gang members that remain. They look at him with a low face. One gang member gives Jake one of their jackets. Jake quickly returns to Gail.

He starts to sing, which turns into a duet. They sing of a better world and a place where they can love each other freely. The cast on stage sings the second verse or a chorus to the song. This is the last major group singing done on stage. It is the same song as before, but changed a little — the word "You" is replaced by "We."

> **DECLARATION OF THE PEOPLE — FINAL SONG**
>
> You live in a time where we must make up our minds.
>
> For soon we will have nothing but the shadows of our world.
>
> When will we stop killing one another.
>
> When will we listen to one another.
>
> So before we kill any more of each other, let us try to understand one another.
>
> We are all doomed if we can't find a way to live and love each other.
>
> We'll have to search beyond the comfort of the world we feel is real.
>
> It is said pain breeds pain, and love breeds love,
>
> and sometimes they are one in the same.
>
> So understand, everyone, what we must do isn't simple,
>
> but the other road leads nowhere.

Then there is silence as one notes, standing around with their heads staring into space in silence, the multis that are left in town. Suddenly, many grays and blues pass by them as if they were not there at all — the morning rush.

END OF ACT THREE — SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

We Are Here

> **MUSIC**
>
> *Each verse of the song is said at least twice. The first time it is sung by the person dancing that particular part. Then the group sings the verse as a choir in harmony. Between each song/chant verse there is a short bongo drumbeat or hands clapping. A primal and organic feeling is needed here.*

It is late one afternoon. Few grays or blues are walking about, and none of them seem to notice the gang of multis, the deaf one, and the store multi sitting together. The deaf multi is just finishing teaching the gang a simple sign language lesson. They all pause as the store multi starts the song: "We Are Here."

DANCE

With each verse of the song progressing, a new piece of dance movement is created collectively. It is contact improvisation with a heavy undertone of Taoist feeling, like the movement of Tai Chi Chuan. With each verse of the beginning, one member of the sitting group joins into the dance. First they sing, then they dance. The dancer/singers could start the movement slowly as they sing. The deaf multi signs the last verse a third time in silence.

SONG — "WE ARE HERE"

[Chorus]

We are here to blend our minds and bodies with our souls.

We are here to warm ourselves from the cold.

We are here to find wisdom before we are old.

When we are here we must try to be humble and learn self-control.

We are here to learn from each other and hopefully love one another,
before we hurt any more of one another.

We are here to heal our tortured souls so we may live long enough to become old.

For we are the teachers of future creators, the children of the soul.

We are children who never want to stop loving all children.

We are here, those who want to find the rhythm that lay hidden within our souls.
We are here until we develop the unity of mind, body, and soul with the cosmic whole.

[Solo]

Perhaps, one day we will not need to be here.
Until that day — we are here.
Until that day — we are here.

When the song ends, the cast pauses again for a moment. Some then stay to talk and others walk away. A few go back to putting out fires they have been starting throughout the whole production. They were going to burn the city, but had a change of heart.

Then one of the gang multis sees a nicely dressed blue woman drop her wallet from her handbag. One young multi smiles at his friend and goes after the woman. As he comes near her, some gray men see him and are about to get brave until they see his multi gang so close by. The smiling young one gently touches the lady on the back as she is about to enter her building. She turns around shocked, as she sees the boy. She gives him a look of horror.

The boy's smile leaves his face as he sees her facial expression. He points to where she was walking. He is trying to show her what happened with her bag. As he tries to hand her the bag, she draws back and stares at him in horror. The multi boy is hurt and mad. He drops the handbag on the stairs. He turns to go back to his friend. The young one shakes his head as he slowly walks down the stairs of the building. The woman then notes that many of the people in the street are looking coldly at her. She knows that she is wrong about the boy.

The young one suddenly turns around. There is a moment of stillness between these two people. The woman slowly gives him the friendship gesture of the deaf multi. The boy ponders the gesture, then returns it. A soft tonal change in the music occurs as the two look upon each other for a moment. Afterwards, the young one slowly continues down the stairs and into the street. The woman watches from the side. In the background, his friends are watching.

The whole cast now extends their arms to the audience in the peace hand/arm symbols of the deaf multi. There is the soft sound of chanting voices and a feeling of thunder in the background as the play ends.

> **CLOSING STATEMENT OF THE AVATARS**
>
> *The Watcher ends the production with a thought and the blow of the horns:*

> *Humanity lost in rapture of its own self-importance has forgotten that all its creations are nothing on the scale of cosmic infinity.*
>
> *Perhaps the development of unconditional love, respect, and compassion for all forms of life will aid this race of beings in creating some enduring distinction as a life form.*
>
> *Humanity must first learn that such benevolent emotions are not bound by human subjective material laws. For love and compassion bridge all the subjective barriers humans have created to contain them. For these emotions are linked to a more universal plane of existence. If humanity could at least understand this concept, there is hope.*

> ***Let us watch and see.***

END OF PRODUCTION

Author's Notes & Production Appendix

Measures of Human Dignity is notes for a postmodern theater or opera about the isolation of the homeless from the usual level of American stratification in terms of economic, cultural, and social standards.

> *We will try to show that there are values by which people can measure themselves that can and do give them a feeling of self-worth — a self-worth that can help give meaning to their lives.*

There will be a lot of attention paid to the concept that there are multiple emotional, mental, and physical states of being. This project will use these various states of being to show that there exists more to the world of the homeless than is usually thought. We will show that this world relates to the everyday environment that the average American lives in day to day. An overarching issue will be how these worlds overlap more than people think.

This production should have music, dance, and theater. What will be different about this piece is that we will try to combine all three so as to create a sense of organic unity in the players. It is important that this production not seem highbrow or for the upper class. The texture must be rich but not thick. The players must feel and express themselves but should be understandable to anyone, no matter where they are from or what they do in life.

> ***Additional Note:*** *Then a loud high-pitched shocking voice is heard. All but the old man and the deaf mute have fallen to the floor. It is the collective voice of the Avatars — those beings that dwell in a dimension beyond the world of the multis, the grays, or the blues. All are in awe, because the Avatars never speak. Now, not only do they speak, but they turn the sky deep purple. There is a chorus; the first part is a chant.*

Footnotes

[1] Many times people think of the homeless as a people who live in a depressed area. Homeless people can be found in all areas.

[2] Something like the group Take Six, but more multi-dimensional in cultural influences.